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Bureau of municipal research, New York City

HOW MANY  
WHEN DO  
WHY DO } CHILDREN FAIL?

A Cooperative Study as to Means of Reducing  
Non-Promotion and Undue Acceleration

Which is worse, retardation or acceleration?

Exception was recently taken by one city superintendent of schools to our **Efficient Citizenship No. 393** because we reprinted, without comment, two extreme diagnoses of retardation—acceleration of the unfit and non-promotion of the fit.

More recently the program committee of the Washington Irving High School (New York City) declared in a brief entitled **The Opposite of Retardation**: "We believe that it is of more value to find out how successful teachers educate their children than it is to dwell upon the negative side of retardation and its causes. Why mention the reasons of failure and elaborate them!"

But why confine ourselves to either extreme? Most of us are able to go down a road whether we walk in the middle, on the extreme left, on the extreme right or zig zag from left to right. Certainly no one can doubt that it has been worth while for the school men of the country to begin to ask questions about promotion and non-promotion, acceleration and retardation, pupil's fault, parent's fault, school's fault, budget's fault, overcrowding's fault.

The purpose of asking questions is primarily to put in circulation best methods, and not merely to impart information. Contributions will be welcome to the three kinds of light thrown on best methods for reducing non-promotion and preventing undue acceleration presented in this report:

I. Digest of returns from seventy-six answers to our non-promotion inquiry No. 2;

II. Forms used and questions asked by various city superintendents;

III. Extracts from letters addressed to the Bureau of Municipal Research and from official reports.

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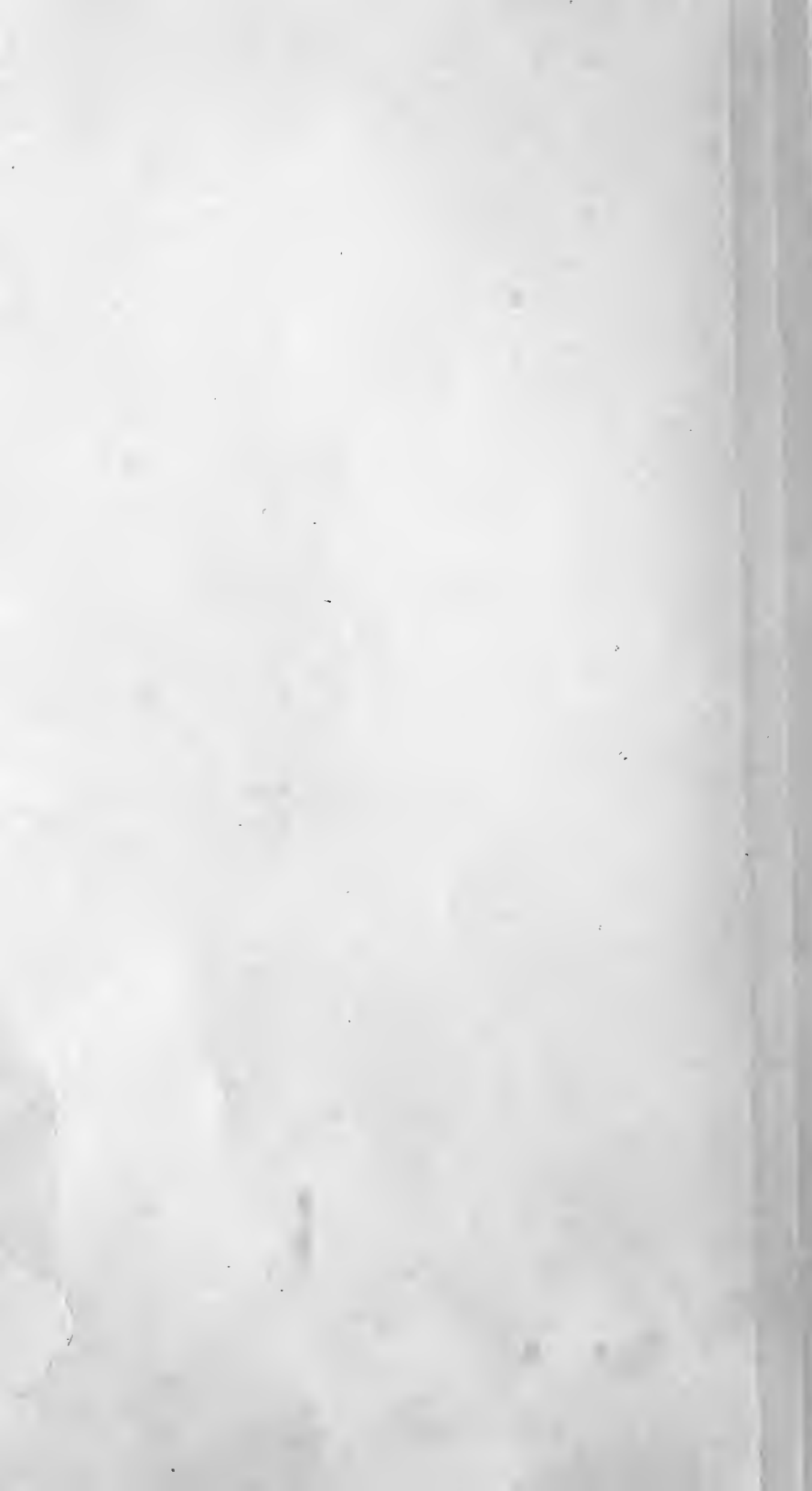
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## I. Digest of returns from seventy-six answers to our non-promotion inquiry No. 2

Of 76 superintendents whose replies are given in the enclosed table,

- 71 have irregular individual promotions in addition to stated general promotions;
- 45 expect the principal to see each pupil before marking him for non-promotion;
- 32 expect the principal to require written explanation by the teacher as to each child before it may be held back;
- 26 report that the superintendent's office reads these explanations;
- 9 report that the superintendent's office requires oral explanation;
- 30 report that the written explanation gives the name of each child and the cause or causes of his non-promotion;
- 40 count inefficiency of teacher as one cause of non-promotion;
- 28 count too many classes as a cause of non-promotion;
- 33 count crowded classrooms as a cause of non-promotion;
- 16 count part time as a cause of non-promotion;
- 59 count irregular attendance as a cause of non-promotion;
- 57 count late entrance as a cause of non-promotion;
- 60 report that the superintendent or principal discusses with teachers and parents the causes and remedies for non-promotion;
- 46 plan to discuss non-promotion in their next report;
- 67 base promotion partly on term's work and partly on ability to do next term's work in advance grade. Of these 22 lay emphasis on the term's work, 38 on the child's ability to do next term's work, 3 say "cannot separate the two," and 2 say "depends on child."
- 6 promote on the term's work;
- 5 promote on child's ability to do next term's work;
- 14 have special "catch-up" classes;
- 10 have vacation school classes for non-promoted children;
- 66 require that special attention be given to pupils in danger of failing;
- 45 give other special attention to non-promoted pupils;
- 20 do not state time for this special attention, but answer "time not stated," "varies," "when teacher can," "when needed," etc.
- 25 devote part of each day to this special work, 9 do not specify time, 16 give the time variously as "before and after sessions," "late P. M.," etc. Leadville, Colo., employs a special teacher, Champaign and Danville, Ill., leave matter to parents, Hazleton, Pa., devotes one-third time to individual work;
- 45 believe it possible to promote a higher percentage of pupils without danger to the thoroughness of their schools;
- 16 have found inefficiency in pupils' work resulting from special promotions;
- 18 have found inefficiency resulting from irregular promotions.

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## II. Forms used and questions asked by various city superintendents

### 1. In Kearney, N. J., Superintendent Dressel requires :

- Name.
- Age.
- Grade.
- Was he promoted to your grade conditionally?
- Power of application. Best in what subjects?
- In what subjects is he the weakest?
- Is he capable of better work in these subjects?
- If not promoted would he retain his interest and ambition?
- Has he the mental power to do advanced work?
- Did you interview the parents?
- Was the pupil informed that he would fail of promotion if he did not improve?
- State any physical defects which may have interfered with pupil's progress.
- Did you take into consideration these defects when his case was decided?
- State any other possible cause for his defective work.
- Note that pupils are not to be held back in a grade—
  - If they have the ability to do advanced work.
  - If their standing is good in English, reading and spelling.
  - If they fail only in any one subject.

2. In Hyde Park, Mass., three different promotion records are kept; (a) double promotion; (b) not promoted; and (c) promoted conditionally. For all three classes general questions are asked as to name, address, age, grade, repetition of previous grades if any, general health, sight, hearing, conditions if any when pupil started grade. For pupils not promoted these additional questions are asked:

- Number of days absent during current school year.
- In what subjects is he deficient?
- To what causes are the deficiencies due?
- How many interviews have you had with his parents?
- How many supplementary reports have you sent to his parents?

For pupils promoted conditionally, these questions are added to the above:

- Do you think he can do the work of the next grade?
- Is he to study during vacation? For examination?
- Is he physically able to stand this?

3. In Cleveland, Superintendent Elson's statistical tables contain these headings:

- a By Grade:
  - Number promotions and number non-promotions
    - from entering grade first time
    - from previously entered.
  - Percent of promotions and non-promotions
    - on number remaining
    - on total registration
- b Distribution of pupils by studies and failures in each by grades.
  - Per cent. of failures on enrollment.
- c Distribution of non-promotions by ages and causes.
  - Causes: Irregular attendance, physical defects, incapacity, personal illness, indifference.
  - Per cent. of all non-promotions due to each cause.
- d Distribution of non-promotions by ages and grades.

4. In **Oakland, Calif.**, a card printed on two sides is used as here reproduced:

**NON-PROMOTION REPORT**

**CITY OF OAKLAND, CAL.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

No. of weeks in grade \_\_\_\_\_ 5ths done \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Examination \_\_\_\_\_

RECORD. Write F for failure; P for passable; S for satisfactory.

Weeks Enrolled	Days Absent	Conduct	Application	Reading	Writing	Spelling	Composition	Grammar	Arithmetic	History	Civics	Geography	Drawing	Hand Work	Music	N. S. H. S.

What subjects were taken in higher or lower grade?

What special help has been given pupil?

Previous Promotion Record

Health

(OVER)

(Reverse side)

What has been done to secure the co-operation of the parents to prevent failure?

Underline probable cause of failure: Irregular attendance, physical defects, personal illness, incapacity, immaturity, indifference.

Reason assigned by pupil for failure

Remarks by teacher

Remarks by Principal

File one copy with the Superintendent and one with the Principal within five days after date of promotion } Date filed \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to this individual non-promotion report, a class promotion record card is kept calling for the following data from each teacher:

- Number promoted before examination or class promotion.
- Number promoted at examination.
- Number present during last month not promoted.
- Number who have left and not returned since beginning grade.
- Number who were more than 21 weeks in grade.
- Date class began the grade (give month, day and year).
- Date of promotion (give date of final examination).
- Number of school weeks from date of beginning grade to date of promotion.
- Name of teacher of preceding grade.
- Age distribution of promoted pupils at time of promotion.
- Names of pupils not promoted, age, fifths done by each and probable cause of failure.

5. In Indianapolis, the blanks apportion failures among the following causes:

- a Slowness, dullness, inattention, idleness.
- b Mental defect.
- c Physical defect.
- d Ill health.
- e Irregular attendance.
- f Wrongly placed.

In addition facts are given for:

- g Back in reading.
- h Back in arithmetic.

In the different grades the proportion held back for slowness, etc., varies from 1.5% in 8-A to 9% in 5-B. Of 23,492 children in white schools, 22,000, or 9.36% were held back as reported in April, 1910. We give herewith the distribution by half grades (A in New York = B in Indianapolis) of the total held back in Indianapolis reported in April, 1910, and in New York in February, 1910:

Percent Held Back.					
Grade	New York	Indianapolis	Grade	New York	Indianapolis
1 A	32.0	3.2	5 A	17.0	8.1
1 B	17.7	5.9	5 B	17.0	6.8
2 A	16.9	8.3	6 A	17.4	7.8
2 B	17.1	7.2	6 B	17.2	4.9
3 A	17.2	9.7	7 A	18.2	4.1
3 B	15.7	8.3	7 B	16.5	4.3
4 A	15.2	9.2	8 A	16.8	3.
4 B	17.2	7.8	8 B	10.9	.7

6. In Malden, Mass., in addition to the Doubtful Promotion Blank already issued by us—Efficient Citizenship No. 361—the parent receives a quarterly report on studies, effort and behavior, including sessions absent, times tardy and times dismissed. For the quarters ending December 24 and April 15 the “prospect of promotion” is stated. On the reverse of this report blank is the following message to parent or guardian:

To Parent or Guardian.

This report sheet has been authorized by the School Committee as one method of informing parents of the progress of their children in school. It is believed that a statement by the teacher in plain English will prove more satisfactory than the use of the letters E, G, F, and U.

Other means of informing parents of the progress of their children are the following:

**Supplementary Reports.**—Whenever a pupil falls behind in his studies to such an extent as to endanger his promotion, or whenever his attendance or conduct is unsatisfactory, the parent will be notified immediately by means of a special report. (This is regarded as a distinct pledge made to the parent. Failure to notify is regarded as a breach of faith on the part of the teacher.) If no such supplementary report is received, the parent may rest assured that his child is making satisfactory progress and will be duly promoted.

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**Inspection of Pupils' Work.**—That parents may have an opportunity to judge for themselves of the quality of the work done by their children, written matter will, so far as practicable, be sent home for inspection. Careful examination of this work will aid the parents in judging the ability and effort of their children and will prove a source of encouragement to both pupils and teachers.

**Personal Visitation.**—No form of report card, and no inspection of the written work of the pupils, can take the place of a personal visit. Parents are urged to visit the school frequently, that they may observe the regular work and make personal acquaintance with the teachers who have charge of their children.

7. In **Elizabeth, N. J.**, Superintendent Clement issues a circular letter to teachers demanding the real reason for non-promotion: "For instance, it is not enough to report 'will not study'; absence is not a reason unless the cause of absence is given."

8. In **New Bern, N. C.**, Superintendent Craven's report to the board, to teachers and to the public of failures in 1910 contains the following explanation as to 242 (31.5%) left over pupils based upon "careful investigation":

77 or 32.8% were absent 20% or more of the entire session.

40 or 16.5% moved elsewhere, many of them entered school.

49 or 20.2% were slow and undeveloped pupils, largely in primary grades.

30 or 12.4% were lazy, careless and indifferent, did not care to learn.

(These pupils if awakened and inspired should have been promoted.)

20 or 8.3% admit openly that they did not study. (These pupils were largely in 6th and 7th grades and should have been interested and so should have been promoted.)

5 or 2.6% went to work.

5 or 2.6% came from ungraded country schools. (These pupils were prepared in some of their work and very much behind on other subjects, especially mathematics.)

2 or .8% died.

3 or 1.2% were left over on account of bad health.

11 or 4.5% were left over on account of defective eyes, ears, etc.

9. In **Northampton, Mass.**, Superintendent Congdon "does not believe in waiting until end of the year before asking the teachers for a report on pupils who are not passing," but requires a regular monthly report calling for a "discussion of the case of each pupil who is not doing passing work, giving reason for failure, telling what special effort is made to improve the pupil's work, and what has been done to make the parents acquainted with the facts."

10. In **Decatur, Ill.**, Superintendent Wilson requires that all teachers submit to him two weeks before promotion time a tentative promotion report containing the name, age, terms in grade and standing of all pupils, plus reasons where pupils are tentatively reported for failure or "conditional pass."

11. In **Pottstown, Pa.**, Superintendent Rupert writes that teachers give from one to two hours daily to work with individual pupils. At the end of the third month the superintendent examines all scholarship records, and through conferences with teachers seeks to determine the causes and apply the proper remedies. The last two weeks of the year, morning sessions only are held, and the afternoons are devoted to the special instruction of pupils who are not quite up to the standard of promotion. Parents are asked through a special letter to cooperate by encouraging children to attend these classes.

12. In **New York City**, Superintendent Maxwell said to the school principals and superintendents on January 9th:

Promote every child whose class teacher recommends on term marks; personally investigate each case of every child who is not recommended and examine to see whether he may not be promoted.

Require in the case of each child not recommended for promotion a statement from his teacher in writing as to reasons why he is not recommended. It will not do to accept such a statement as 'deficient in studies.'

A full statement from the teacher is preferable to having her check off a list of reasons submitted by the principal. While not lending itself to statistical arrangement, it does cause the teacher to think why she has not recommended a child for promotion.

13. This rule is illustrated by the report of a teacher of 3-B grade in **Great Falls, Mont.**, who replies to the question, cause of failure in your judgment:

F. B.—Absent five weeks with scarlet fever.

A. R.—Did not enter school until the middle of October.

G. B.—Deficient.

M. H.—Entered in November from Lewiston and was not up to grade.

D. H.—Conditioned into 3-B from 2-A } very weak

M. H.—Conditioned into 3-B from 2-A } pupils.

14. For other printed blanks which demand causes of failure of individual pupils, write to school superintendents of **New Bedford, Mass.**, **Great Falls, Mont.**, **Cripple Creek, Colo.**, **Mt. Vernon, N. Y.**, **Williamsport, Pa.**, **Council Bluffs, Ia.**, and **Providence, R. I.**

15. For samples of full newspaper reports, with causes, write to the school superintendents of **Woonsocket, R. I.** and **Waterbury, Conn.**

16. For bulletins already issued by this Bureau, reproducing the blanks used in **Marlborough** and **Malden, Mass.**, address **Efficient Citizenship Nos. 404** and **361** respectively. For **Montclair's** letter to parents, address **Efficient Citizenship No. 391**; for **Williamsport's** attention to doubtful pupils, address **Efficient Citizenship No. 368**; for data contained in **Cleveland's** (1909) school report, address **Efficient Citizenship No. 226**.

### III. Extracts from letters addressed to the Bureau of Municipal Research and from official reports

#### I. From **Decatur, Ill.**, Superintendent Wilson writes:

The following questions should be asked by teacher, principal and superintendent before non-promotion:

Was the child in ill health?

Was he hampered by physical defects?

Did home conditions tax his energies and cause him to fail to get needed rest at night, deprive him of sufficient food and detain him from school?

Was he growing rapidly so that his energy and vitality were all consumed here?

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Was he with pupils so much younger and so much different socially that his failure to adjust to their atmosphere and spirit handicapped him?

Was the room so overcrowded that he did not receive individual aid?

Was he in a part time school?

Was he with a teacher who was incompatible?

Was he put at a disadvantage by changing schools or teachers two or three times?

Are you absolutely certain the requirements of the course of study and the standards for promotion are ideally correct?

Is his threatened failure due to your general estimate of his ability or does it result from his standard in percentage from a series of examinations imposed from above?

2. From **Detroit, Mich.**, Superintendent Martindale attributes a decrease in the percentage non-promoted in thirteen years from 25% to 8% to the system of promoting children solely upon their ability to do advanced work; and further attributes the following good results to this method:

The establishment of kindergartens.

The lengthening of the term of normal training for teachers.

The raising of the standard required for the appointment of teachers.

The division of the city into ungraded districts and the establishment of an ungraded school in each district.

The establishment of special school for the deaf, backward and other children.

Medical examination of pupils.

The appointment of a child study committee to investigate all conditions surrounding pupils and especially to look into the physical and mental conditions of special cases.

The introduction of manual training and industrial training.

3. **New Bedford, Mass., Cripple Creek, Colo., and Providence, R. I.**, never hold a pupil more than two terms in a grade, hoping that the new work, new teacher and other encouragements may help the child to advance normally. Superintendent Maxwell reports that "hundreds have been held in one grade two, four, six terms."

4. In **Rutland, Vt.**, 90% of the children attending four weeks of "catch up" vacation school were promoted, "and about 90% of those thus promoted made good in the advanced grade the following year. In this way very few of our pupils in the 5th grade and above really fail in doing one year's work."

5. **Waltham, Mass.**, pursues a policy of daily promotion and transfers a child without delay to the class in which he can do the best work.

6. In **Cleveland, Ohio**, Superintendent Elson has recently adopted three promotion periods a year instead of one; (a) to save children who are not well started in the grade from being a drag in the class for the whole year; (b) to reduce the amount of work repeated by those failing; (c) to enable the bright child to advance more rapidly.

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7. In **Fort Smith, Ark.**, Superintendent Kuykendale tries through conferences with parents to eliminate much of the irregularity of attendance. In a study of backward children extending over several years, he found that late entrance, frequent moving and similar causes caused two-thirds of the retardation.

8. As has already been noted, 46 superintendents of the 76 answering our inquiry, plan to discuss non-promotion in their next reports. Of the 135 school reports for 1908-1909 and 1909-1910 which the Bureau has at its disposal, only 35 give any figures on the extent of non-promotion, or state what definite steps are being taken to study the problem and prevent non-promotion. In addition to the report of Superintendent Elson of **Cleveland (1909)** already mentioned, suggestive material is to be found in the following reports:

**a Promotion Tables**

Tables of promotions and failures may be found in the reports of **New Britain, Conn. (1909)**; **Meriden, Conn. (1910)**; **Moline, Ill. (1910)**; **Michigan City, Ind. (1910)**; **Owensboro, Ky. (1909)**; **Medford, Mass. (1909)**; **Melrose, Mass. (1909)**; **Malden, Mass. (1909)**; **Cincinnati, Ohio (1909)**; **Dover, N. H. (1909)**; **Johnstown, Pa. (1910)**; **Salt Lake City, Utah (1909)**; **Barre, Vt. (1909)**; **Marinette, Wis. (1910)**; **Baltimore, Md. (1909)**; **Harrisburg, Pa. (1909)**; **Kansas City, Mo. (1910)**;

**Philadelphia, Pa. (1909)**, gives the per cent. promoted for the years 1905-1909 and the number and per cent. in grade from 20 to 29 months, 30 or more months. The per cent. promoted in 1907 was 69.3; in 1909, 81.5. The per cent. of the number in grade 20 or more months in 1907 was 12.7; in 1909, 3.9. Superintendent Brumbaugh attributes this very "gratifying reduction of the number of repeaters in the grades to (1) the compilation and publication of district and city reports, and (2) to the intelligent studies of these and the underlying conditions that have been made by the principals and the district superintendents."

**Chicago, Ill. (1910)**, gives tables including the number promoted and per cent. of promotions for each school. Regarding retardation, Superintendent Ella Flagg Young says: "With a clearer understanding of the relation which should always obtain between the principal and each and every pupil in the school, there will be a much smaller problem for solution under the head of retardation."

**Manchester, N. H. (1909)**, gives tables of promotions and failures for each term and purposes "to pro-

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ceed systematically and embody in the annual report the records (which shall include causes) of all such (failures), that the public may be informed."

**b Recording Causes**

In addition to tables of figures, the following reports give the causes of non-promotion and the number or per cent. of pupils failing under each cause: **Moline, Ill.** (1910); **Melrose, Mass.** (1909); **Concord, N. H.** (1910); **Williamsport, Pa.** (1910); **Columbia, S. C.** (1910).

**c Special Studies**

Special studies of non-promotion and its causes were made in **Moline, Ill.** (1910); **Williamsport, Pa.** (1910); **Columbia, S. C.** (1910); **Meriden, Conn.** (1910); **Lowell, Mass.** (1909).

**d Group Systems**

**Fresno, Cal.** (1910) reports favorably on the plan of dividing classes into major and minor sections in each subject, by which more individual attention may be given to the minor sections. Another successful plan is that of arranging sections on the basis of pupils' general capabilities and of passing them along as rapidly as possible.

**Baltimore, Md.** (1909), reports the introduction of the group system by which, among other benefits, are obtained (1) better distribution of pupils; (2) better gradation of pupils with possibility of rating; (3) special classes. Pupils advance at varying rates of speed and may be promoted at any time.

**Cambridge, Mass., and Portland, Me.** (both 1909), contain descriptions of their respective plans for the gradation and promotion of pupils by which pupils are divided into different groups and divisions advancing at varying rates of speed throughout the entire course.

**e Individual Help**

**New Orleans, La.** (1910), **Minneapolis, Minn.** (1909), **Mt. Vernon, N. Y.** (1910), **Glens Falls, N. Y.** (1910), **Dover, N. H.** (1909), **Concord, N. H.** (1910), **West Chester, Pa.** (1910), report that individual attention is given during the year to pupils in danger of being held over.

**Pasadena, Cal** (1909), gives help by (1) special study rooms in charge of a carefully selected teacher; (2) alternation of class recitation and study periods so as to use study time for pupils needing special help; (3) attention to individuals by the examination by the health department.



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**San Francisco, Cal.** (1909), has ungraded classes for both individual and class instruction of weak pupils. Pupils weak in one subject are coached in that subject; pupils weak in all subjects are transferred to the ungraded room.

**Marinette, Wis.** (1910), states that the teachers must supply Superintendent Landgraf at the end of the year with a list of all pupils, age, physical condition and causes of failure.

#### f Other Reports

**Watertown, N. Y.** (1910), reports promotion by subject.

**Harrisburg, Pa.** (1909), devotes some space to stating that the only basis of promotion should be the ability of the child to do the next year's work and not "the mere fact of having covered a fixed amount of subject matter in the school room."

**Columbus, Ga.** (1909), gives the returns of an investigation by Superintendent Gibson on the relative merits of annual and semi-annual promotions and the division of classes into sections. Extracts from letters of 32 superintendents are quoted.

#### Recent Progress in New York City

Until uniform and adequate records and reports are in general use, the influence of a few large cities and of progressive small cities upon educational methods will be disproportionate to the merit of their contributions. The large cities will influence because of numbers; the small cities will fail to influence for lack of numbers. Even after it is as easy to learn about 750,000 school children in small cities as about 750,000 in New York City, the experience of the greatest public school system in the world will continue to be of interest and value to all educators.

The following is a digest of extracts from the report of New York City's superintendent of schools for the year ending July 31st 1910:

As far as the schools of New York City are concerned, I have finally settled the question as to the chief cause . . . of retardation . . . late entrance to school. Other causes of retardation there are, however, for which the school must accept its share of blame. To determine what these causes are, and if possible to find remedies, I appointed eight committees of (40) principals early in the school year to study the whole question. The eight committees were in substantial accord in stating that the following are the chief causes of failure on the part of pupils to secure regular promotion from grade to grade. The causes, however, are not stated in any order of intensity:

**Irregular Attendance**—Due to poor home conditions; looseness of parental control; ignorance of parents; lack of opportunities for home study; poverty of home requiring pupils' assistance; sickness of other members of the family; lack of proper clothing; feeble health of individual pupils; poverty of surroundings.

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**Truancy**—Which is attributed by the principals to three chief causes: Lack of support by the courts in enforcing the Compulsory Education Law; lack of co-operation of parents; and lack of a sufficient number of attendance officers.

**Ignorance of the English Language**, due to foreign birth and to the fact that English is not the language of the home.

**Late Entrance into School**, due to two causes: The presence of immigrant children, and the fact that many children are sent to private schools before they enter the public schools.

**Transfer from School to School**—Such transfers involve loss of time owing to variations in the interpretation of the course of study and syllabuses, and in following different sequences of topics in different schools, and frequently to delay in entering school after removal from one school district to another school district.

**Physical Defects**—These are caused or intensified by lack of medical care; nervous troubles; adenoid growths and enlarged tonsils; defective eyes, ears and teeth; malnutrition; physical precocity; lack of play and exercise; unsanitary conditions.

**Sluggish Mentality**—Sometimes this feature takes the form of positive mental defect and sometimes it characterizes pupils as slow in receptivity and response. Sometimes it takes the form of moral defects, such as dishonesty, lying and cheating, which are intensified by improper reading, the following of bad examples, and petty defiance of law in the streets.

**Excessive Size of Classes**, which prevents teachers giving necessary individual instruction.

**Prolonged or Frequent Absences of Teachers**, during which their classes are taught by substitutes who are sometimes indifferent and sometimes inefficient.

**Part-Time**, which prevents pupils from doing the work of the lower grades thoroughly.

**Varying Standards of Rating Pupils**—Some principals and teachers adopt too high a standard; some too low a standard.

**Inefficient Teaching**, due to teachers' talking and doing too much for their pupils; lack of thoroughness; obsolete aims and methods in teaching on the part of some of the older teachers; occasional lack of the power of discipline; neglect of opportunity afforded by the study period to teach children how to study.

**Improper Methods of Promotion**, due to unnecessarily holding back pupils; not making promotions with sufficient frequency; and to differing standards of promotion.

The analysis made by these principals of the causes of retardation in their various schools showed that the two chief factors are personal illness on the part of pupils and late entrance into school.

The remedies suggested by the various committees were many and heterogeneous. There seemed to be little agreement as to what, if any, changes in our system should be made in order to eliminate as far as possible the admitted evils of retardation. In order to obtain a more definite result, I classified the various suggestions and submitted them (April 18, 1910,) in the form of direct questions to a committee consisting of the chairmen of the original committees.

On pages 82-86 are found the committee's answers to the twelve following questions:

Is it advisable to divide the matter in each subject of study in each grade of the public schools and topics to be taken up in the same order in all schools?

Should a uniform method of rating pupils in studies and a uniform standard for promotion be formulated?

How often should final or general promotions be made?

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What rules should be adopted to determine the number of terms a pupil may be held in any one grade?

Is it advisable to modify the course of study for classes of retarded or backward pupils? What subject, if any, or what portions of subjects if any, should be omitted from the present course in such classes?

Is it advisable to organize special classes for the rapid advancement of particularly bright pupils?

Is it desirable to make a distinction between the graduates of the elementary schools who may be admitted to the high school and the pupils who have passed through all grades without gaining enough proficiency to be entitled to a diploma?

Is it advisable to employ assistant teachers to coach backward pupils?

Should algebra and involutional geometry be eliminated from the course of study in the elementary schools?

Should science be eliminated from the 7th and 8th grades of the elementary schools?

How may enthusiasm be stimulated and the will to work developed in indifferent pupils?

Should foreign languages be eliminated from the course of study of the 8th year of the elementary schools?

In Appendix A to the superintendent's report will later appear valuable suggestions written by Associate City Superintendent Gustav Straubenmüller.

**On non-promotion** the city superintendent writes: "It is quite manifest that more pupils should be promoted each term than are promoted at present, and that more should be done than is now done for the not-promoted." (See earlier reference to written explanation by teachers and to presumption that a child shall pass if able to do the next term's work—page 7.)

Attention is called to the fact that promotions were more liberal in June than in January; that the number of over age children was smaller in June than in January, and that the promotion of this particular class of pupils was more generous. Poor teaching is classed with absence, illness and indifference among the reasons why "there will always be a considerable percentage of pupils who should not be promoted."

### The Danger of Acceleration

Writing to the school editor of the New York Globe, a Bronx principal has protested that the more generous promotion of pupils in June was too generous and that large numbers of children were being advanced to do work for which they were unprepared.

The percentage of the promotions at schools has been mysteriously and suddenly increased. Instead of investigating the cause of non-promotion and finding faults and weaknesses in the course of study, methods of teaching, in over-crowded classes, instead of finding a remedy for these evils, wholesale promotions were introduced merely to raise the percentage figures mechanically. If the number of promotions is relatively small the wise thing to do is to find out why they are small. To promote more pupils whether they are fit or not is a folly which can only be compared with that of the ostrich who hides his head in the sand so that no one can see it.

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At the meeting of the New York City Teachers' Association, January 17, 1911, the following resolution was adopted:

Resolved, that it is the sentiment of this association that the chief cause of retardation and its concomitant of over-age pupils in the elementary schools is the overburdened course of study.

That the teachers of our schools work harder now than ever before to secure the advancement of their pupils.

That any attempt to force promotions on an inflated percentage can only result in accentuating the difficulty and that the resulting deterioration in the moral fibre of principals, teachers and pupils from such evasive and dishonest methods must bring consequences far more disastrous to the schools than any now resulting from retardation.

Concrete illustrations of acceleration were given in a New York Times editorial, January 13th, 1911:

A despairing teacher has brought to our attention the work of some forty boys of the 8A grade who were asked to tell in their own words the substance of Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village' and Burns' 'A Man's a Man for a' That.' The following samples are fairly typical:

#### FOR A' THAT AND A' THAT

See that man over there who walk as through he owned the world he is but a lord and yet their our many who does his bidding as through he was a king but he is nothing more than an honest man.

#### THE DESERTED VILLAGE

While I was wandering around I meet with grief I always had hope that before candle within me when out that I would be sitting around that little old fire place where many a happy an hour was spent and show them that my life long hours had not been spent on doing nothing.

These boys are from 14 to 17 years old. Judging by their names, they are of English, German and Irish extraction. They have attended school at least seven years, during which time they have been periodically promoted. By the operation of what principle or policy they were placed among those considered deserving of promotion we leave to the educational authorities to conjecture or explain. But if the conduct of the schools is to be investigated, the investigation ought not to be short of inquiry into the methods of promotion from grade to grade, and the degrees of proficiency that are deemed adequate for promotion in the several schools.

Those wishing to make studies of the extent and causes of retardation and non-promotion in their own schools will do well to obtain copies of Superintendent Maxwell's report. Building upon the tremendous gains marked by this report and the study which preceded it will be easy because so many definite questions are propounded and because the written explanations by teachers will furnish facts taken directly from individual children who fail rather than from theories or beliefs of principals, teachers and superintendents. In a short time it should be possible to state the causes in order of intensity instead of emphasizing the fact that they are not stated in any order of intensity.

While late entrance to school is given as the chief cause of retardation, the table on pages 91-92 of the report shows

that in January and June respectively 58,500 and 49,000 who failed of promotion were of normal age. Again, of 19,000 who failed in the 1-A grade in January only 2,300 were over age, so of 17,000 in 1-B grade only 2,124 were over age. Furthermore, between September and June 30, for which date more generous and more liberal promotions are noted, 51,000 children dropped out of the elementary schools in addition to those who graduated in February. These facts are cited to raise a question that is fundamental to any discussion of retardation, non-promotion and late entrance: **Shall non-promotion and retardation figures be based upon ages or upon failures?**

In New York City normal age for the first grade includes all children (a) under six, (b) six to seven, and (c) seven to eight. Normal age in the fourth year includes (a) under nine, (b) nine to ten, and (c) ten to eleven. In other words, a child may come at five (3,918 June 30, 1910) fail once or twice in his fifth year, fail twice in his sixth year, and fail once in his seventh year, and still be classed as normal and unretarded when entering school the following September.

If the New York figures for over age followed Cleveland's classification and gave but one year to a grade, the following additions would be necessary to those over age in each of the eight regular grades:

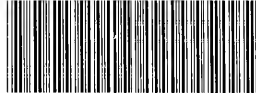
1	.....16,777	5	.....2,746
2	.....23,343	6	.....19,533
3	.....24,167	7	.....18,413
4	.....23,841	8	.....13,043

In addition several thousand children should be added who are excluded from the age tables because in special classes for the over age, for non-English speaking and other handicapped children. Thirdly, there should be added part of the 51,000 children who represent the difference between net enrollment for the year and those in school June 30th when the age tables were prepared, after excluding graduates.

Readers of this bulletin may take for granted that for some time to come the subjects of retardation, non-promotion, undue acceleration, late entrance, etc., will be the subject of continuous concern on the part of New York City's teachers, principals, superintendents and local school boards and will do well to apply for information to the school authorities at 59th Street and Park Avenue.

## Two Other New York Inquiries

Two other contributions to these subjects are being made this year in New York City: (1) the local school boards, which have 230 members, are taking greater interest than ever before in school matters, and are at this particular time endeavoring to work out uniform standards of efficiency and inquiry among board members themselves. For information apply to Leo Arnstein, secretary, borough of Manhattan, City Hall;



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(2) the proposed inquiry by the board of estimate and apportionment will deal with these same questions, first from the standpoint of the amount of money involved and the directions in which money shall be spent so as to decrease evils, and secondly, from the standpoint of methods of organization and supervision which will mitigate causes of non-promotion and retardation. The chairman of the committee is President John Purroy Mitchel, 51 Chambers street.

### **Nation Wide Demand for a Common Language in Describing School Experience**

At the Mobile meeting of the division of superintendence of the National Education Association next month, a report of progress will be made by the special committee appointed at the Indianapolis meeting, 1910, to recommend uniform and adequate records and reports. The secretary is Prof. George D. Strayer, Teachers' College, New York City.

At Mobile a form of financial statement will be recommended upon which the N. E. A. Committee, the U. S. Bureau of Education, the U. S. Census Bureau and the Association of School Auditors have agreed. A common language for the discussion of such subjects as non-promotion and retardation should be worked out and agreed upon in time to affect the records with which school men will begin their work in September, 1911, and in time to influence the discussion of the school superintendents for the year ending June, 1911.

For discussion of the general work of the Bureau of Municipal Research for efficient citizenship, budget making, accounting, etc., address:

**BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH,**

**261 Broadway, New York.**

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